



Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

# Fiscal Year 2016-17 Major Accomplishments



## **FISCAL YEAR 2016-17 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Mission Statement:**

*To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity;  
protect and restore the natural environment;  
and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment*

The accomplishments listed below highlight the District's focused efforts on the three parts of its mission—land acquisition and preservation; natural resources protection and restoration; and public access, education and outreach—combined with significant efforts to develop the administrative and organizational systems necessary to support this mission now and into the future. These accomplishments are extensive and varied, showing a focus on major preserve opening projects such as the Mount Umunhum Summit in the Sierra Azul Preserve, La Honda Creek Preserve, and Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve. They also show significant efforts on complex resource restoration priorities, education, and outreach to the District's diverse preserve visitors, effective partnerships with other organizations to better fulfill the mission, and focus and dedication to the ongoing operational requirements of managing over 63,000 acres of open space. As is evident from this list, and the many other efforts completed or underway that are not summarized in this major accomplishments list, Fiscal Year 2016-17 was a busy and productive year for the District!

### **LAND ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION**

- Purchased, exchanged, or received gifts of 275 acres of open space lands valued at \$4.2 million dollars, including:
  - 191-acre Conley property as an addition to *Long Ridge Preserve* to protect redwood forest and the upper Pescadero watershed.
  - 28-acre Rossetta property to secure public access rights along Mount Umunhum Road and the Woods Trail in the Mount Umunhum area of *Sierra Azul Preserve*.
  - 51-acres of property within the Rancho de Guadalupe area of *Sierra Azul Preserve* to protect grassland habitat and water quality in the Guadalupe Creek watershed.
  - Five-acre Santa Clara County Roads & Airport exchange property to *Saratoga Gap Preserve*.
  - Two redwood parcel gifts totaling 0.5 acres to *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve*.
- Completed a property boundary survey to address a fence dispute on Kennedy Trail in *Sierra Azul Preserve*.
- Drafted Patrol and Fire Control Easement and made offer to a private landowner at Twin Creeks in the Loma Prieta area of *Sierra Azul Preserve*.
- Entered into a Letter of Understanding with a private property owner in *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve* regarding allowable uses and property transfer terms to proceed with a lot line adjustment and secure coastal uplands as an addition to the Preserve.
- Completed a survey of the Lobitos Creek Conservation Easement Area in *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve*.

- Completed the Planning Analysis and Fair Market Appraisal of undeveloped land that may serve as a gateway to the San Mateo Coast near the *Miramontes Ridge Preserve*.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION AND RESTORATION**

- Completed numerous natural resource protection and restoration projects in *Sierra Azul Preserve*, including:
  - Completed the fifth year of the coordinated monitoring effort to reduce mercury within the Guadalupe River Watershed.
  - Completed the first phase of invasive plant removal and developed a partnership with the San Jose Conservation Corps for the Hendry Creek watershed restoration effort.
  - Created a new contract with Grassroots Ecology Native Plant Nursery to grow approximately 1,900 native plants and five pounds of native grass and forb seed for Phase One of the Mount Umunhum Revegetation Project.
  - Created a migratory bird exclusion and monitoring plan and installed interim exclusion measures for the Mount Umunhum Radar Tower.
  - Developed a habitat restoration plan for the Mount Umunhum Summit to enhance the native plant recolonization of the restored mountaintop, incorporating input from the Amah Mutsen tribal group on Native American restoration techniques.
  - Submitted a mitigation plan for the three pedestrian bridges on the Mt. Umunhum Trail to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and completed 30% of plantings per the plan.
- Implemented numerous natural resource protection and restoration projects in *La Honda Creek Preserve* in preparation for opening the lower area of the preserve to the public in late 2017, including:
  - Constructed nine in-stream, large woody debris structures to restore and improve salmonid spawning and rearing habitat within San Gregorio Creek, and began preparations for the placement of additional woody debris structures downstream for fiscal year 2017 – 2018.
  - Performed annual red-legged frog monitoring in support of the District’s recovery permit for the federally threatened species.
  - Completed site clean-up and demolition of numerous dilapidated structures, including photography documentation of the structures prior to demolition, to prepare the preserve for public access.
  - Completed construction of a new corral system at the previous site of the Wool Ranch house to assist with grazing efforts.
- Began significant natural resources protection and restoration projects in *Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve* in preparation for opening the preserve to the public in late 2018, including:
  - Implemented the first year of a targeted invasive species treatment to restore native habitats throughout the Preserve.

- Completed a Pond Assessment and Management Plan to determine the water needs for wildlife and habitat values at aquatic sites.
- Completed the Bat Habitat Enhancement and Relocation Plan to protect the bat colonies at Alma College.
- Began the first year of the western pond turtle population study and developed a Western Pond Turtle Management Plan.
- Surveyed seven miles of trails for Sudden Oak Death to determine if treatment or control actions are needed to protect the tree canopy.
- Negotiated and received Board approval for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the District to expand our invasive species removal efforts.
- Completed an Archaeological Resources Curation Guidelines Report to address cultural resources within the Preserve.
- Completed initial filings for Preserve water rights.
- Entered into a contract with the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council for removal of non-native and fire-prone eucalyptus trees at *Los Trancos Preserve*.
- Completed a toxicological review of four new chemicals with the potential to be included in the List of Approved Pesticides as part of the Integrated Pest Management Program.
- Completed annual San Gregorio Creek Watershed reporting and monitoring requirements.
- Held the annual public presentation to the Board of Directors from Lehigh Quarry's CEO about the quarry's activities.
- Collaborated with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to install two fog collection experimental stations at *Skyline Ridge* and *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserves* to conduct research on the viability of fog water harvesting.
- Completed year four of the San Francisco Garter Snake field study and ongoing bullfrog eradication work at Mindego Ranch in *Russian Ridge Preserve*.
- Completed the installation of pasture fencing at Big Dipper Ranch in *Skyline Preserve* to support the ongoing conservation grazing program.
- Completed corral demolition, water system installation, and fence installation at the Bluebrush grazing and residential properties at *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve*.
- Completed grazing fencing improvements at Tunitas Ranch in *Tunitas Creek Preserve*.
- Completed a bioblitz on the Toto Ranch property in *Tunitas Creek Preserve* to collect biological resources data for the property.
- Completed preliminary field investigations to support the analysis of potential Highway 17 wildlife crossing locations near the *El Sereno, St. Joseph's Hill, and Bear Creek Redwoods Preserves*, conducted stakeholder outreach, completed a draft Recommended Alternatives report, developed conceptual fencing design, and evaluated feasibility of additional crossing location based on stakeholder and public feedback..

- Completed mowing projects at Toto Ranch in *Tunitas Creek Preserve* to control invasive species, at October Farm in *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve* to control brush encroachment, and at Bluebrush Canyon in *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve* to control invasive species and reduce wildfire fuels.
- Completed invasive control work at the Apple Orchard and Driscoll Ranch properties adjacent to *La Honda Creek Preserve*.
- Completed multiple *District-Wide* natural resource protection and restoration projects, including:
  - Implemented 11 new invasive species management projects, adding 7.4 acres to the District's 1,238 acres under management for invasive species.
  - Created District-wide maps of all special status species studies and created an eGIS application to collect location information and species observations for future studies.
  - Drafted a Marbled Murrelet Management Plan in collaboration with California State Parks and funded a habitat suitability assessment for this federally threatened and state endangered species.
  - Sponsored a training for Sudden Oak Death and investigated 150 samples to determine areas of presence and spread of Sudden Oak Death in the Santa Cruz Mountains.
  - Sprayed fungicide on or removed bay seedlings growing adjacent to 388 specimen oak trees to prevent infestation with Sudden Oak Death and contribute to scientific research.
  - Investigated and documented 14 revegetation sites for symptoms of soil Phytophthora diseases.
  - Hired a Climate Fellow to work on climate resiliency strategies for the District.
- Actively participated in the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network, a region-wide and cross-sector collaboration of independent individuals and organizations who are committed to practicing effective stewardship on their own lands and coordinating their efforts with other land stewards to enhance stewardship on a regional level.
- Continued efforts to develop a policy to address cattle predation issues on District grazing land through interviewing grazing tenants and conducting a literature review with an outside consultant.
- Completed numerous resource agency permit streamlining efforts, including:
  - Expanded the District's US Fish and Wildlife Recovery Permit for California red-legged frog and San Francisco garter snake to cover more activities over the entire District (previously two discrete locations only).
  - Completed notification and payment to California Fish and Wildlife and Regional Water Quality Control Board for up to 50 discrete project worksites in 2017 under the District's Routine Maintenance Agreements.
  - Applied to renew the California Fish and Wildlife Scientific Collecting Permit and Memorandum of Understanding to allow staff to work directly with and handle California red-legged and San Francisco garter snake.



## **PUBLIC ACCESS, EDUCATION, AND OUTREACH**

- Completed numerous major actions and commenced or continued other major actions to prepare for the September 16-18, 2017 grand public opening of the *Mount Umunhum Summit* at Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, including:
  - Completed major construction milestones on the Mount Umunhum Trail, including the construction of an additional 0.5-mile trail segment, the narrowing of old abandoned road cuts into a trail, and the installation of three new pedestrian bridges.
  - Completed the Guadalupe Creek Overlook vista point structure.
  - Completed 75% of the road safety improvements on Mount Umunhum Road, which will be made open to public vehicular use from Hicks Road all the way to the top of the summit.
  - Completed 75% of the summit improvement, which will provide 57 vehicle parking spaces, a restroom, signage, road safety upgrade, two shelter structures, a ceremonial space, two staircases, and trail access around the summit area.
  - Regraded and restored the summit topography closer to its natural landform.
  - Finalized the design of eleven large-scale interpretive panels and one bronze plaque, all currently under fabrication and soon to be installed at the summit.
  - Initiated a new 30-minute audio walking tour for the summit that will describe the natural history, military history, Native American significance of the site, and ongoing conservation efforts.
  - Created a detailed plan to implement the historic dedication of the summit, including a weekend celebration event.
- Completed numerous major actions and commenced or continued other major actions toward opening lower *La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve* to the public in late Fall/Winter 2017, including:
  - Completed three miles of ranch road repairs, which are critical for opening the roads to public access; maintaining safe passage for patrol, maintenance, and emergency vehicle use; and providing ranch access to support the ongoing conservation grazing program.
  - Finalized plans to replace the decking and install new rails on the Harrington Creek Bridge, which will allow trail users to cross a major creek.
  - Completed stakeholder outreach and received Board approval for new trail names and a new loop trail in the Lower La Honda Creek area.
  - Received Board approval to begin construction of the new Sears Ranch Parking Area, which will provide 22 vehicle spaces, a restroom, signage, and the main trailhead to access the trails in the southern area of the Preserve.
  - Began preparations for a groundbreaking ceremony and a grand opening ceremony for new Sears Ranch Parking Area.
  - Completed site investigations and two conceptual designs for the proposed Red Barn parking area and trailhead gateway entrance; and conducted focused stakeholder outreach

to receive public input on the two designs, including a Planning and Natural Resource Committee meeting and a community open house.

- Completed numerous major actions and commenced or continued other major actions toward opening *Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve* to the public and improving Bear Creek Stables, including:
  - Received Board approval of the Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve Plan and certification of the accompanying Environmental Impact Report, which included as plan components the Alma College Cultural Landscape Rehabilitation Plan and Bear Creek Stables Site Plan.
  - Completed archaeological studies in advance of ground disturbance activities as required by the project's Environmental Impact Report, prior to beginning trail construction and road improvements work.
  - Began clearing roads to establish two key trail connections that will connect visitors between the future new parking area and the trails that will be opened on the west side of Bear Creek Road.
  - Conducted an engineering feasibility study to identify the preferred location for a Bear Creek Road trail undercrossing as an option for connecting visitors between the new parking area near the former Alma College site and trails located west of Bear Creek Road.
  - Issued a Request for Proposals and entered into contract to complete the design, engineering, and construction documents for the new, Alma College Parking Area, Bear Creek Road undercrossing, and Bear Creek Stables Site Improvements.
  - Conducted initial geotechnical studies to evaluate the integrity of large retaining walls on the property that are supporting a major access road and existing structures.
  - Conducted a recreation planning analysis for potential re-use of the Alma College Chapel.
  - Completed an earthquake fault rupture hazard study to determine if the Alma College Chapel could be occupied.
  - Completed an assessment of water source options and associated cost estimates for the Preserve, concluding that the most cost effective and secure option is to seek a direct water line connection to the San Jose Water Company main line.
  - Executed an agreement with San Jose Water Company (SJWC) to initiate a water line connection to the SJWC main line as the new source of water for the Preserve and Bear Creek Stables.
- Completed numerous major actions and commenced or continued other major actions toward completing the San Francisco Bay Trail Connection Project at *Ravenswood Open Space Preserve*, including:
  - Completed the conceptual trail design, including 30% design plans, completed the environmental review, and received Board approval for the Ravenswood Bay Trail Connection Project.
  - Received support for the proposed Exchange Agreement and Public Trail Easement from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Committee, who has forwarded their

recommendation for approval to the City of San Francisco Board of Supervisors for their consideration in the fall of 2017.

- Drafted a Memorandum of Agreement with the City of East Palo Alto for inter-agency coordination on the Ravenswood Bay Trail Easement.
- Initiated regulatory agency consultation, attended three meetings with regulatory agencies representatives, and received regulatory agency approval for geotechnical investigations to inform the final design of the trail improvements.
- Completed multiple public access projects and specific milestones in *El Sereno, Rancho San Antonio, and Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserves*, including:
  - Added on-leash dog use to six miles of trail and explored potential trail connection routes at El Sereno Preserve.
  - Restored the Deer Hollow Farm white barn milk room at Rancho San Antonio Preserve, which facilitates ongoing environmental interpretation and animal husbandry support for the popular farm site.
  - Completed 69 days of vehicle occupancy counts to understand the parking use patterns for Rancho San Antonio Preserve.
  - Coordinated with the City of Mountain View and Friends of Deer Hollow Farm to prepare for a historic and structural assessment of the White Barn at Rancho San Antonio Preserve to be conducted during FY2017-18.
  - Repaired significant road damage on North Ridge Trail to make it accessible for emergency vehicles, completed extensive repairs on Borden-Hatch Mill Trail and Graptown Gulch Trail for improved access and drainage, received bids for replacement of a key access bridge, and completed geotechnical work to inform the replacement of the lower parking lot restroom at Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve.
- Completed the installation of a parking lot safety netting structure in *Fremont Older Preserve* to protect visitors and vehicles from stray golf balls from the neighboring golf course.
- Continued to make progress towards permitting the Oljon Trail at *El Corte de Madera Preserve* with construction expected to begin in FY 2017 – 18.
- Provided grant funding and partnered with the South Skyline FireSafe Council for a fire break along Charcoal Road adjacent to *Monte Bello Preserve*.
- Entered into contract to initiate an updated geotechnical evaluation of the Alpine Road Trail, owned by San Mateo County, to evaluate the ongoing landslide and drainage problems and identify potential long-term repair scenarios at *Coal Creek Preserve*.
- Received permits for the construction of new pedestrian bridges at *Monte Bello Preserve*.
- Installed a picnic table shade shelter at the David Daniels Nature Center in *Skyline Ridge Preserve*.
- Executed a one-year license agreement with the Hawthorns Preservation Trust & Foundation to begin evaluating a potential partnership for the rehabilitation of the Hawthorns Historic Complex at the Hawthorn Property addition to *Windy Hill Preserve*.



- Conducted numerous field investigations and trail route evaluations for a potential future regional trail crossing over Highway 17 that would become part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail near the *El Sereno, St. Joseph's Hill, and Bear Creek Redwoods Preserves*.
- Completed multiple *District-Wide* public access projects, including:
  - Cleared vegetation for fire safety and public access on roads and trails, and for over 30 District structures.
  - Cleared hundreds of downed trees and repaired numerous roads and trails due to severe winter storms.
  - Gathered visitor use counts by installing 13 counters at various preserves.
  - Regraded multiple roads and trails for improved drainage.
  - Installed nine preserve entrance signs.
  - Engaged in San Mateo County's effort to help identify a new regional trail as the Ohlone/Portolá Heritage Trail for potential designation as a National Historic Trail.
  - Explored opportunities to expand regional trails and connectivity on the Peninsula through active participation in the Peninsula Working Group collaborative.
- Installed 37 Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) in all District emergency vehicles and offices.
- Began work on evaluating the District's volunteer and docent programs in order to improve service delivery and help ensure that the District serves a diverse audience in an effective manner.
- Purchased eight maintenance vehicles, five patrol vehicles, three administrative vehicles, and two tractors.
- Represented the District at 47 community outreach events, including the San Mateo Coast.
- Developed a Fog Harvesting informational webpage on the District's website to inform the public of an ongoing partnership with USGS on researching the effectiveness of various pilot fog collectors in harvesting water at *Skyline Ridge Preserve* and *Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve*.
- Hosted the annual Volunteer Recognition Event at *Ravenswood Preserve* on September 24, 2016 to recognize the District's volunteers (more than 19,000 hours of volunteer support) in restoring native habitats and hosting environmental education activities for the public.
- Hosted the sixth annual Wingding Family Festival at *Skyline Preserve* on May 20, 2017, with more than 400 people in attendance.
- Promotion of GeoPDF program resulted in a 1,000% increase in map downloads from the website onto personal mobile devices by the public, indicating that the downloadable maps are being widely used to enhance trail navigation by our visitors.
- Hosted a series of three health hikes for the public in partnership with the San Mateo County Medical Association.

- Hosted a series of 10 hikes for the public in partnership with Latino Outdoors at seven different preserves, reaching 95 participants of whom many were new to District preserves.
- Continued memberships with the Chambers of Commerce in the Cities of Los Altos, Mountain View, Redwood City, Sunnyvale, and Half Moon Bay to outreach with the business community.
- Developed a Youth Outreach Strategy for the next one to three years with long-term outreach goals for youth of elementary school, middle school, high school, and college age.
- Signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Student Conservation Association to engage students from diverse backgrounds in District work and help mentor the next generation of conservation leaders.
- Initiated development of a Preserve Use Survey Study to understand who is visiting District preserves, what the experience is like, how visitors are accessing the properties, and what might be the reasons why others are not benefiting from the opportunities to head out to their open space lands.
- Developed a Coastal Communications Plan in partnership with the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to enhance our outreach and engagement on the San Mateo Coast.
- Conducted a one-week tabling campaign for mountain lion awareness at *Rancho San Antonio Preserve*.
- Continued consultation and collaboration with the San Mateo County Farm Bureau regarding the District's conservation grazing program and other agricultural efforts on the San Mateo County coast.

#### **GENERAL/DISTRICT-WIDE SUPPORT OF MISSION**

- Issued 2016 Green Bonds Refunding to refund the existing 2007A and advance refund the 2011 bonds. Saved \$15.8 Million (20.1%), reduced final maturity by three years, and sold 65% of the new bonds retail. This issue was the District's first Green Bond and included a coordinated multi-media marketing effort.
- Continued implementation of critical *Financial and Operational Sustainability Model Study* recommendations to enhance the District's delivery of Measure AA projects and fulfillment of its Vision Plan and Mission, including:
  - Implemented additional New World Systems financial software enhancements and modules.
  - Researched and developed curriculum and process for an internal District Leadership Academy.
  - Researched, developed, and implemented elements of the new District-wide New Hire Onboarding Program.
  - Completed development and received Board approval of numerous new and updated District policies.
  - Reorganized the Human Resources and Public Affairs Departments in order to increase efficiencies and improve operations within these two departments.

- Worked with Board, staff, and local legislators to initiate SB 492 (Beall), which enables the purchase of ~6,500 acres of watershed land from San Jose Water Company and SB 793 (Hill), which allows the District to utilize design-build methodologies for its projects. To date, both bills have cleared their house of origin with bipartisan support.
- Held five Diversity Ad Hoc Committee meetings to implement the Board-approved Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- Instituted a District-wide Telecommuting Program with clear policies and guidelines for telecommuting as an alternative work arrangement that continues to meet District business needs while assisting with employee recruitment and retention.
- Implemented numerous administrative procedural improvements to support and streamline business functions, including:
  - Trained staff on the District's Project Delivery Process and presented the Project Delivery Process to the Board.
  - Built a scalable framework into Microsoft SharePoint, creating a District-wide intranet and solution for tracking projects.
  - Conducted vendor research and received presentations for asset management solutions.
  - Coordinated and implemented the District's first Enterprise GIS, providing real-time data access to staff and serving as the source record for District assets.
  - Completed the installation of 4G, GPS, and powered computer docking capability on 23 District patrol vehicles to improve field communications.
  - Completed a comprehensive signage inventory database for all District preserves.
  - Completed implementation of hyper-converged infrastructure improvements to support future IT initiatives.
  - Increased the internet bandwidth of the South Area Outpost field office for improved connectivity.
  - Completed an internal training database for all District departments.
- Completed a District Housing Structures Assessment for the Driscoll Ranch Area of La Honda Creek Preserve and secured Board approval to build Agricultural Workforce Housing in partnership with San Mateo County.
- Completed installation and repair of water systems at Big Dipper Ranch, Stevens Canyon Ranch, 5755 Alpine Road (Silva), and Toto Ranch.
- Completed improvements on 32 District residences, some of which house rangers and maintenance staff who provide onsite, after-hours monitoring of the District's Preserves.
- Completed the resurfacing and repairs of driveways at 105 Rapley Road, 22322 Skyline Blvd., and Toto Ranch.
- Received Board approval for the purchase of a new South Area Field Office in Campbell to improve ranger and maintenance dispatch times and increase the District's presence in the southern Preserves.

- Obtained Board approval to investigate new Administrative Office building options in order to meet long-term business needs and house all the administrative office staff, functions, and programs at one location.
- Obtained Board approval to demolish the El Sereno residence.
- Completed development and obtained Board approval of a new District Housing Policy.

### **AWARDS/GRANTS/RECOGNITION**

- Evaluated over 30 grant opportunities, completed one grant application, completed four disbursement requests, negotiated a new grant agreement, and finalized one grant amendment.
- Received Board approval of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Santa Clara Valley Water District for a five year, \$1,000,000 funding agreement to complete invasive species removal at ***Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve***, with a possible five year extension for another \$1,000,000.
- Received Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approval of a \$400,000 grant funding agreement to help fund trail design and construction.
- Won the Outstanding Planning Document award from the Association of Environmental Professionals for the Preserve Plan/EIR for the ***Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve***.
- Received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association for the first time.